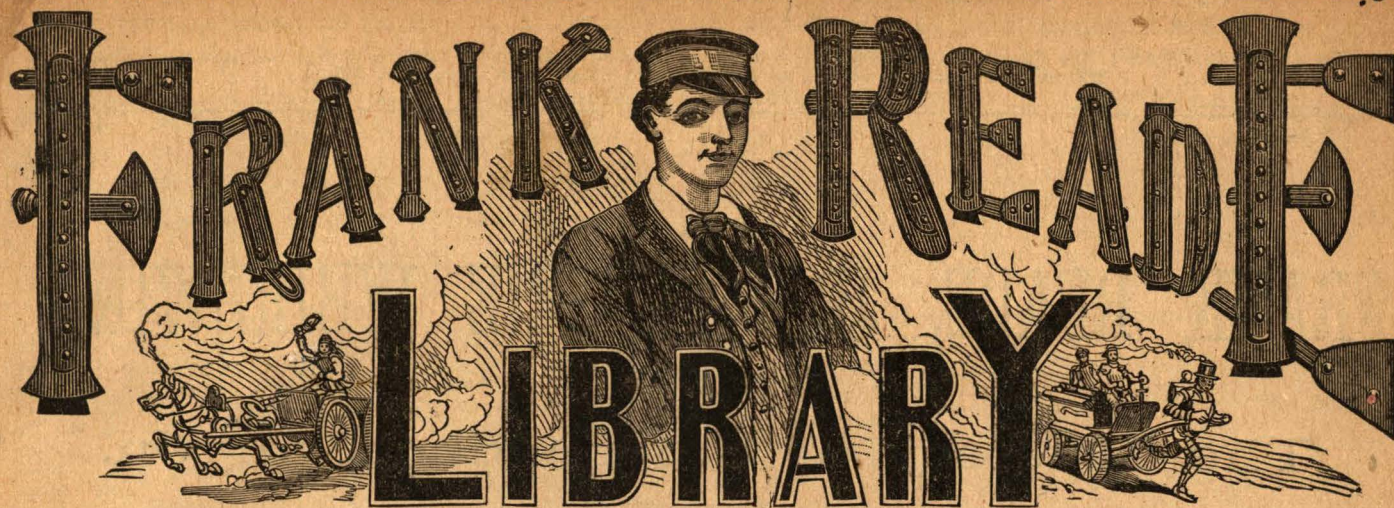


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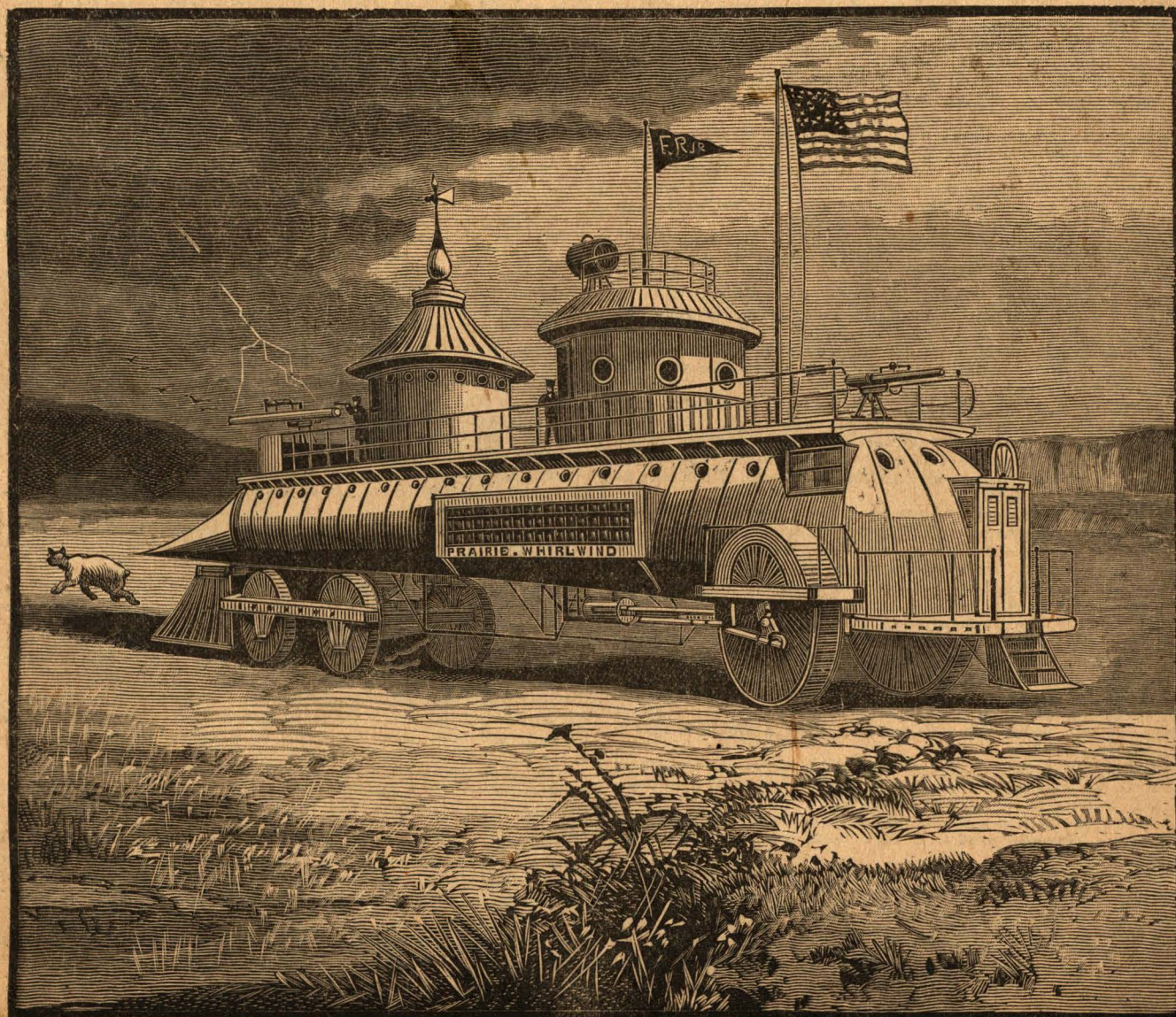


Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, October 5, 1892.

No. 95. { COMPLETE. } FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK. { PRICE } Vol. IV.
New York, November 30, 1894. ISSUED WEEKLY. { 5 CENTS. }

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Frank Reade, Jr.'s PRAIRIE WHIRLWIND;
OR,
The Mystery of the Hidden Canyon.
By "NONAME."



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FRANK READE, JR.'S PRAIRIE WHIRLWIND;

OR,

The Mystery of the Hidden Canyon.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Missing Island; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Wonderful Trip Under the Deep Sea," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK READE, JR., AND THE WHIRLWIND.

DEEP down among picturesque hills was situated the little city of Readestown. A beautiful river wended its way to the sea through the fertile valley. Here were located the machine shops where were perfected the wonderful inventions of the famous and distinguished young inventor, Frank Reade, Jr.

Probably no man the world over is more widely known or justly celebrated than the famous projector of the steam man, the electric horses and the submarine boat.

Everything which Frank Reade, Jr., essayed was bound to be a success. He seldom met with failure.

He had enriched himself with the product of his inventions, and so wanted for nothing. His whole soul was wrapped up in his inventions.

Closely attached to Frank were two faithful servants. Barney O'Shea, a good natured and witty Irishman, with a broad mug and a shock of red hair. A negro, black as a coal, named Pomp. These two were warm friends, and much devoted to their young master.

Pomp was an AI cook and generally handy in other respects. Barney was a skilled engineer and a clever electrician.

Rumor had gone abroad that Frank Reade, Jr., had been long at work upon a new invention. Just what this was remained for some while a mystery.

But one day the newspapers of the country came out with thrilling reports of a projected trip through the Far West by the young inventor.

This trip, it was reported, was to be made with a new invention called the "Prairie Whirlwind." This was a machine or vehicle of wonderful construction.

The Southwest, which was really the region Frank intended to visit, was at the time afflicted with all the horrors of an Apache war.

The savages had made many and horrible depredations, and troops had been called to the relief of the settlers. Knowing all this, Frank Reade, Jr., had perfected his machine for the purpose of offensive as well as defensive warfare.

He had left nothing undone to make it proof against the attacks of a foe. It was impervious to anything but a cannon ball.

A brief description of the new machine might not be amiss here.

In shape it was long and not unlike a howitzer, with the tapering off toward the front. The body was a shell of finest and toughest steel.

In this there were windows of plate glass protected by bullet-proof netting and loopholes through which to fire at an enemy. The entrance to the Whirlwind was by means of a door in the rear and a small platform with steps jutted out from this.

Upon the top of this cylindrical body was a deck with long guard rails extending to a high dasher in front, and behind which upon a pivot rested a pneumatic dynamite gun, the invention of Frank Reade, Jr., and which was capable of throwing a projectile fully a mile with deadly effect.

Amidships there rose a tower or turret which had circular windows, and upon the front of which was located a powerful search-light capable of throwing a ray of light for two miles.

Forward of this was a pagoda-shaped tower which served as the pilot-house. Doors opened from both these towers out upon the deck.

The running gear of the Whirlwind consisted of a pair of high wheels behind and a traverse frame supporting four smaller wheels in front. These could be turned by a switch in the pilot-house to the right or left so as to give a guiding power.

The two rear wheels were the drivers, and connected with powerful electric engines which could propel the machine at railroad speed.

Forward was a cowcatcher and a sharp, steel-pointed ram. This is a meager description of the exterior of the Whirlwind.

Entering by the rear door, the interior presents a wonderful spectacle. First one stands in a vestibule, beyond which is a small cabin chamber, containing stands of arms and ammunition. Beyond this is the main cabin or salon. This was dazzling to the eye.

Frank Reade, Jr., had spared no expense in making this apartment a scene of beauty.

Richly upholstered furniture, heavy satin hangings, rich cabinets built into the hull, with stores of silverware, cases of rare and valuable books and scientific instruments. All these were deemed requirements of the trip.

Beyond the main salon came a number of comfortable state-rooms. Then the galley where Pomp did his cooking, and next the engine-room.

Here were the wonderful electric dynamos and engines, the invention of which were all a secret of Frank Reade, Jr.

Of course none of these compartments aboard the Whirlwind were capacious, yet the passengers moved about with comparative ease, and were not much cramped.

There were plenty of Winchester rifles, lots of ammunition, and two electric guns aboard the Whirlwind.

This made of her almost a traveling arsenal, and she was impervious to anything like an ordinary attack.

The wheels were provided with cushion rubber tires so that little jolt or jar would be given the occupants. Of course the machine was not constructed for use in a mountainous or rocky land.

The great plains of the southwest afforded a desirable surface for her to travel over. These were generally quite even and smooth in surface.

Quite a large quantity of stores and provisions could be carried aboard the Whirlwind, so that she could travel in a desolate country for a long while without stopping.

The Prairie Whirlwind was truly a wonder and one of the inventive triumphs of Frank's career.

While the young inventor had decided on a trip through the war-convulsed southwest he had not as yet conceived any definite object or mission.

But this fell to his lot in a curious way. Chancing upon a paragraph in a daily paper Frank read the following interesting account of thrilling incidents which at once interested him:

"Wall Ranch attacked by Geronimo's band of Apaches. Forcible abduction of the beautiful young daughter of Wesley Wall, one of the richest ranchmen in New Mexico.

"A band of Geronimo's Apaches, led by the red fiend Cut Nose, yesterday made a descent upon the ranch of Wesley Wall at Black Range, N. M., and near the mining town of Satan's Hole.

"The Ranchmen were outnumbered and fought the reds gallantly, but were forced to retire to the inner stockade when a body of United States troops under Lieut. Carl came upon the scene just in the nick of time.

"Cut Nose beat a retreat into the hills. The cavalry pursued, but he eluded them. The saddest event of the day was the mysterious disappearance of Corinne Wall, the beautiful young daughter of the ranch owner.

"That she had fallen into the clutches of the Apaches could not be doubted. A band of rescuers was organized, but no clew could be found. The agonized parent was frantic and offered a large reward for her rescue. It is believed that Cut Nose intends to hold her for ransom."

Frank read this thrilling account, and his veins tingled. Here was that seemed to him like an opportunity to accomplish a heroic and

philanthropic act, and at the same time afford him an object for visiting the Southwest.

"I will endeavor to rescue that girl," he declared, resolutely. "That will be sufficient mission for me, and no doubt I shall succeed in finding other cases of the kind. There will be work enough for us, I will venture."

At this moment the door opened. A short, comical figure appeared on the threshold.

"Shure, misther, I've jist had a bit av a dispute with the naygur, an'—"

"Barney!" exclaimed Frank, peremptorily. "What do you mean, sir? Have I not forbidden you and Pomp indulging in disputes or wrangling in any fashion?"

Barney looked sheepish.

"Shure, sor, I moind that," he replied; "but he was that fresh wid me, sor, I cudn't help it. He jist towld me how yez had changed yer moind, an' was not goin' West, sor, wid the Whirlwind. I towld him he was a loiar, sor, an' shure I hope yez will bear me out in it."

"Don' yo' beliebe dat, Marse Frank!" cried a shrill voice behind the Celt, and Pomp sidled into the room. "Dat 'fishman he jest too funny! I done bet him mah hat agin his dat yo' wuz goin' to New Mexico, an'—"

"Begorra, didn't I tell yez so?" cried the Celt, making a grimace at Pomp. "Ain't New Mexico in the West, shure?"

"No, sah!" retorted Pomp; "it am not in de West."

"Shure yez are off, naygur. Phwere the devil is it thin?"

"It am in de Soufwest!"

Pomp grinned triumphantly, and for a moment Barney was nettled. Then the Celt dropped his hat and squared off.

"Don' yo' put yo' nasty hands on me, chile!" screamed Pomp.

A ruction would have ensued then and there but for the interposition of Frank Reade, Jr.

"None of that, you rascals!" he cried. "Be off about your duties. I shall start for New Mexico on Thursday. Have the Whirlwind packed in sections aboard freight cars, and everything else in readiness for the trip."

The two jokers, for such they were, stood for a moment with delighted faces and flashing eyes. Then each gave a whoop of joy.

"Ki dar! I se gwine to de Soufwest!"

"Begorra, it's off we are!"

Pomp cut a pigeon wing and Barney threw a flip-flap through the door. Away they went in wild enthusiasm to execute their orders.

The anticipation of the trip to New Mexico was a source of keenest delight to them. There was nothing they enjoyed more than these trips of adventure with Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor laughed at their comical exit and muttered:

"Faithful fellows! I could not well undertake such a trip without them! I trust we shall have the best of fortune!"

Then he set about collecting all such material in the office as he wished to take with him.

He was thus busily engaged, when suddenly there came a tap at the door. He had seen a messenger boy cross the yard of the machine shops while glancing out of the window.

At once he cried:

"Come in!"

The door opened and the messenger boy held out his book. Frank signed his name and broke the seal of the telegram.

And as he read it a great change came over his face. The contents of the dispatch were of great interest as well as entirely unexpected. It furnished yet a stronger incentive for the trip to New Mexico.

CHAPTER II.

AT BIG GAP—THE DESPERADOES.

Thus the telegram read:

"BIG GAP, NEW MEXICO, JUNE 10, 18—.

"FRANK READE, JR., READESTOWN, U. S. A.—I have heard much of you and your wonderful inventions. Cannot you give me aid? My darling daughter Corinne has been stolen away by the Apaches and I am in horror and despair. I feel sure that you, with your flying machine, can rescue her. Answer and relieve the agonized heart of a sorrowing father.

WESLEY WALL."

"This is queer," muttered Frank. "I was just about to start for New Mexico with that purpose in view."

Then he sat down and wrote a reply as follows:

"WESLEY WALL:

"I am now on my way by special train to your place. Shall bring my new Prairie Whirlwind, and will do all I can to aid you to recover your stolen daughter. Keep up good heart.

"Yours ever, FRANK READE JR."

The messenger boy made a hasty exit, and Frank now set rapidly at work to accomplish all preparations for his departure.

In some way an account of the proposed trip to New Mexico leaked out.

Ever willing reporters at once flooded the newspapers with the report. Frank Reade Jr., and his new Prairie Whirlwind became at once famous.

So when the day of departure came and the special train aboard which the machine was packed was at the depot, a great crowd gathered to see the party off.

It required three cars to carry the framework and parts of the Whirlwind. The fourth was a private car in which the explorers traveled.

Frank bade good-by to his friends and the cheering crowd, and with Barney and Pomp went aboard the train.

It rolled out of the depot. Readestown was quickly left behind and the great journey was begun.

There was no railroad to Satan's Hole. Its terminus was at Big Gap, accordingly that was the objective point.

Night and day the special train sped on. At the large cities brief stops were made. Here the depots were always crowded with curious people who were eager to see what the Whirlwind looked like.

Their desire, however, was not very well gratified as the machine was carefully packed away in sections in the cars. But they did get a chance to look at the famous travelers, Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp.

Big Gap was far out at the end of a branch line of the Southern Pacific, and in a wild region.

However, it was reached in safety, and then the work of disembarkation began.

Skilled workmen, who were to return, had come as far as this point to aid in putting the machine together.

This was being done under Frank's supervision, when a little incident for a time interrupted proceedings.

Big Gap was a typical New Mexico town, with its coterie of miners, herders and gambling sharps.

The arrival of the special train had excited no little interest, and as a result nearly the entire population came down to the depot to see what was going on.

No little comment was made as the Whirlwind began to take shape beneath the efforts of the workmen.

"By jimeracks, Bill!" cried one tough-looking sport to a companion, "I shed say here wuz a pooty how-de-do! These yer tenderfeet seem ter be takin' a heap o' liberties in our kentry, eh?"

"By Jeremiah! yew air right, Dan Burley!" retorted the other, as he toyed with the handle of a six-shooter. "Kain't say I jist approve of it."

"We're durned fools tew stand hyar an' see it goin' on, an' make 'em pay no tribute to this ere municipality," growled Dan Burley. "Ain't we cits of this festive burg, eh, Bill Sharp?"

"Reckin we air!"

"Ain't nothin' hes stuck enny harder in my crop fer some time!"

"Me nuther?"

"Thet settles it! I'll go down an' represent this leetle municipality jist as a patriotic cit ought ter dew!"

"Kerec! I'm back of ye!"

Frank was busy instructing his workmen how to adjust some parts of the Whirlwind, when he heard a sound in his rear, and a heavy hand tapped his shoulder.

Frank turned and faced the desperado Burley. He instantly sized him up, and knew that trouble must come.

Burley's face was as red as a lobster, and his voice was thick and maudlin, and his manner swaggering, as he said:

"Hello, pilgrim!"

Frank coolly replied:

"Well, what is it?"

The Western tough's hand flew instantly to the butt of his revolver. But he did not draw it. He glared at Frank for a moment, and then gritted:

"Pooty fresh fer a tenderfoot!"

"Well, what do you want?" said the young inventor, coolly. "My time is valuable. State your business!"

He knew well the character of the man before him. He was aware of the fact that bluff was the best game played in an emergency like the present. So he proceeded to meet Burley upon his own ground.

"State my business, eh?" roared the desperado. "Wall, yew kin bet the last man who bridled up tew me that way is planted under six feet of earth, an' left a weeping widder ter mourn him. D'ye know who I am?"

"I know you're a bully and a coward!"

Frank looked sternly, unflinchingly into the villain's eyes.

"What!" roared Burley, again fingering the butt of his revolver.

"Shall I say it again?" asked Frank.

The desperado brushed back the brim of his slouch hat and looked at Frank hard for a moment. Then he said:

"It's a wonder I didn't shoot ye fer that."

"You didn't dare to!" said Frank, in the same, steely manner.

"Am I not right?"

"I know yew are a condemned greenhorn an' I take mercy on ye. But it'll pay ye to be civil."

"Well, allow that. What do you want?"

"I want to know what right ye've got to cum into ther respectable burg of Big Gap an' disturb ther peace in this manner? What sort of a derrick air yew rigging up thar?"

"Are you the mayor or the sheriff?"

"I'm a peacemaker in this ere town and a regulator of ther peace. I don't 'low no tenderfoot like you tew step in hyar an' boss me neither. Afore yew kin go a step further with this highfalutin' arrangement, yew hev got tew show yer license!"

"Have I?"

"Yes, an' lively tew!"

Burley swelled up and assumed a blustering attitude. For a moment Frank was undecided how to act.

He was not at all anxious to have a fight with any of the desperadoes of the place immediately upon entering it. For all he knew these people standing about were all friends or colleagues of the ruffian's and stood ready to help him.

But a sudden impulse seized him to meet the rascal with his own ammunition. He acted instantly.

He saw that Burley's hand was upon the butt of his revolver. He knew the instinctive quickness with which these desperadoes made a "draw" or obtained a drop.

He knew that if the advantage was to be his he must act with great rapidity. He did so.

It seemed swifter than a flash of light that his hand flew out of his pocket and the muzzle of his revolver was full in Burley's face.

"This is my license!"

The villain's weapon had leaped forth but he was too late. He dared not bring it up to use it. He was caught at his own game. Frank Reade, Jr., held the drop on him for a dead certainty.

"Thunder an' blazes!" he gasped. "Yew hev done it! I cave, stranger. Yew hev the drop!"

Bill Sharp, the second desperado, seeing that his pal was trapped, with fiendish purpose, pulled his revolver and fired almost point blank at Frank.

But the bullet went wide. Barney, who had come forward with a swift leap, struck up his arm and the bullet whistled into space.

"Whurroo!" yelled the excited Celt, "be me sowl, yez will niver shoot Misher Frank while I'm aloive. Have at yez, fer a black-hearted omadhoun! Take that, yez dhirty baste!"

And Barney sailed into the desperado like an infuriated tiger.

The revolver was knocked yards away. The Celt planted blow after blow in swift succession upon the scoundrel's skull and face with his fists and Sharp fell like a log to the ground.

Frank held the drop on Burley who had thrown up his arms.

"I cave!" he cried. "Yew hev got the drop, friend. I'm yours!"

"You miserable dog!" cried Frank, with virtuous wrath. "What do you mean by attacking us in this murderous fashion?"

The crowd attracted by the pistol-shot were now upon the scene. The excitement was most intense.

The sympathies of all to Frank's joy were with him.

"Give it to ther black-hearted cayote!" was the general cry. "Ye've a right ter kill him an' he'll never be missed!"

"No doubt he deserves it!" cried Frank, "but I don't want his worthless life. You miserable scoundrel, I will give you one minute to get out of sight. If you do not take this offer instantly you shall die like a dog!"

Without a word the villain slunk away with his vanquished pal, Bill Sharp, and Barney shaking his fists after them. Two of the most hated and feared desperadoes and "men killers" of the southwest were thus ignominiously put to flight.

"Begorra, I'd loike wan more crack at his ugly mug!" cried Barney. "Shure I wish I'd only pounded him the more!"

"We have done enough, Barney!" cried Frank. "We have driven them away, and that is the main object."

The crowd mainly came forward and congratulated Frank.

He appeared to have their good will at least, and was in a much reassured frame of mind, when suddenly a cloud of dust appeared in the street of the town and out of it emerged two rough riders.

They drew rein not twenty feet distant and dismounted.

One was a man of possibly fifty years of age, prepossessing in appearance, and dressed as a ranchero.

He rushed forward and gripped Frank's hand heartily as he cried:

"I have been anxiously looking for you, Mr. Reade. You have come through safely? Ah, you do not know me. I am Wesley Wall, who telegraphed you a few days ago."

"Wall!" exclaimed Frank. "Indeed I am glad to see you. You see I have kept my word and come on."

"For which God will bless you!" cried the ranch owner fervently. "You are my only hope. I believe that you are the only person in the world who can save my daughter."

"I will do the best I can," replied Frank.

"I am assured of that. Cut Nose is a cunning fellow and will give us a hard fight. But I feel sure that we shall succeed."

"I certainly hope so," declared Frank with tones of sincerity.

CHAPTER III.

ACROSS THE PLAINS.

At this moment the ranch owner's companion appeared on the scene. He was a man of striking appearance.

Tom Talcot, he was introduced to Frank, or Thoroughbred Tom, as his friends all knew him. He was a brilliant fellow, with sterling pluck, as Wall declared.

In all the mines there was not a greater sport than Tom Talcot. He was the best rider of bronchos, the most daring trailer of the Apache, a master of the art of card playing, and in general term a sport.

Tall and handsome, he was dressed in a suit of velvet, with fanciful braid trimming. He wore handsome top boots, and was in striking contrast generally with the rough denizens of Big Gap.

Tom Talcot and Wall, the ranch owner, were bosom friends.

Indeed, there had been a liking of no ordinary sort between Tom and the fair daughter of the rich herder, Corinne Wall.

Tom had made a vow not to rest until he had rescued her or brought her abductors to justice.

That he was much in earnest none who knew him doubted.

Frank was at once impressed with handsome Thoroughbred Tom. The latter gripped hands with him, and said earnestly:

"Mr. Reade, if you can rescue that young girl, you will win the everlasting good will of every right-minded man in the Southwest."

"I will try," replied Frank, resolutely. "I can do no better than that."

"Very true, sir."

Frank took Wall and Talcot aboard the Whirlwind as soon as the workmen had succeeded in putting the machine together. The surprise and interest of the two men as they inspected the machine was extremely great.

"This is a most wonderful vehicle!" cried Wall. "Indeed, Mr. Reade, you could defeat the whole Apache nation."

"If I could meet them in the open field I dare say I could," replied Frank.

"I fear you will not have the chance."

"Indeed!"

"The Indian, you know, shuns an encounter with his foe in the open."

"That is very true. In that case we must invade his stronghold and run him to earth."

"Just so. I shall pray for your success. But what is this I hear? You have had a little rub with two desperadoes since coming here?"

"Indeed I have," replied Frank. "Do you know them?"

"Their names?"

"Bill Sharp and Dan Burley."

Wall gave a sharp cry.

"Do I know them?" he exclaimed. "Well, I should say so! It is more than half suspected that Sharp is the cause of my daughter's abduction."

Frank was astonished.

"How so?" he exclaimed.

"It is believed that he is in league with Geronimo, and that he is a dirty renegade. His reason for abducting Corinne is clear enough. He one time did all he could to induce me to let Corinne marry him."

"And your daughter——"

"She abhors him!"

Frank saw a glittering, dangerous light in Talcot's eyes. He guessed the truth at once. The men were rivals.

"I am glad to know all these points," said Frank, "for I shall know how to act. But now what do you suggest?"

The ranch-owner looked at Talcot.

"We had better go at once to Satan's Hole," he said; "that may be our headquarters. From there we may go forth on the trail."

"Very good!" agreed Frank; "that I believe to be a good move."

Where, in your opinion, have they taken the girl?"

Wall turned and pointed to the Western horizon.

"Do you see a long, dark line yonder?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Well, that is the Apache Range of hills. In that range is a canyon, the location of which is a secret to every white man in the West. Yet it is known to the Indians, and the 'Hidden Canyon' is their safe retreat. I believe Corinne is kept a prisoner in that canyon!"

Frank was interested.

"Why can it not be found?" he asked.

Wall shook his head.

"I hardly know how to answer that question," he said, "but it is nevertheless true. It is entirely hidden from view from the summits of any other hills about. The Pass is so narrow and well defended by the Apaches, that it may be partly explained in that manner."

"Ah, then it is your belief that our first and best move is to find the Hidden Canyon?"

"Yes."

"That we will proceed to do," declared Frank.

A short time later, the workmen finished their work on the Whirlwind. The machinery was put in working order, and all the stores were put aboard.

It was now ready for the perilous excursion into the land of the red-man. Frank dismissed his men, saw that they got safely aboard the special on its return, and then cried:

"Now, we are ready!"

He sprang upon the deck of the Whirlwind, and cried out to Barney: "Start the dynamos, Barney! You, Pomp, take the wheel. Steer due westward."

As the Whirlwind started away, the denizens of Big Gap cheered lustily. They mounted their ponies and galloped swiftly alongside, waving their sombreros and cheering lustily.

Frank stood on the Whirlwind's deck, and answered the cheers by waving his hat.

Then he stepped forward, and elevated the muzzle of the electric gun almost perpendicularly. He placed a dynamite projectile in the breech, and then pressed the electric button.

The projectile was a dynamite time bomb, and rising to the height of a thousand feet, burst in mid-air with the roar of a half dozen cannon.

It was a grand parting salute, and impressed the miners greatly.

Soon the Whirlwind was far out on the prairie booming away to the westward.

The voyagers were in a happy frame of mind. The expedition had begun auspiciously; the Whirlwind moved like clockwork and justified all expectations of her inventor.

"Begorra, it's a foine machine she is!" cried Barney. "I've niver seen a better!"

"I am satisfied with her," said Frank. "All I want now is to find the Hidden Canyon."

Wesley Wall and Thoroughbred Tom galloped on behind the Whirlwind.

They would never have been able to keep up with it had the machine run at full speed.

But Frank kept it at a uniform rate which did not allow them to get out of sight.

And thus they traveled on all that day. When night came it was necessary to camp, as the horses could not proceed further. The Whirlwind came to a stop by a little timber oasis and the two horsemen came up with their jaded steeds.

"Hello!" shouted Wall. "Our horses can never keep up with you—we've got to stop here."

"Is that so?" cried Frank. "That is a great pity."

"Can you travel after dark with that machine?"

"Why, certainly. How much further is it to Satan's Hole?"

"About fifty miles."

"We can be there by ten o'clock if the trail is level all the way."

"Well, it is."

An idea occurred to Frank.

He was much averse to camping, especially when so near his destination as fifty miles.

The Whirlwind could easily make it in three hours. So he acted upon impulse, and said:

"What can you do with your horses if we take you aboard as passengers?"

"Do you mean that?" cried Wall, excitedly.

"It looks to be the best move!"

"Hooray! that's just what suits us. We don't want to intrude—"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Frank. "You are more than welcome. It is queer that I did not think of it before!"

"We're your huckleberries!"

It is evident that both were delighted at the idea of a ride aboard the Whirlwind.

"What about your horses?" asked Frank.

"They will go back to the ranch all right enough by themselves."

"They will?"

"Oh, yes. They know their way as well as we do!"

The saddles and bridles were removed from the two mustangs and they were allowed their freedom.

A moment later the two herdsmen with their equipments were on the Whirlwind's deck.

Frank at once started the Whirlwind away again upon her westerly course. The two new passengers enjoyed the situation immensely.

Darkness now had begun to settle down thick and fast.

But Frank pressed a little button and instantly the interior of the cabin, as well as the deck, was all ablaze with light.

The search-light sent a brilliant pathway across the plain for miles. Of course it was easy for the Whirlwind to proceed under these conditions.

They had now come to an immense tract of country which was overgrown with a matting of deep dry grass. A dry season had made this like tinder, and when suddenly a line appeared upon the southern horizon it surprised no one when Wall cried:

"Mercy on us! The prairie is on fire."

It was true that from some cause or other the plain had become ignited, and an immense conflagration was sweeping over the country.

Frank viewed the scene for some moments with a feeling of uncertainty.

What should he do?

He had no desire to run headlong into what seemed certain death. On the other hand it seemed scarcely safer to turn back.

A prairie fire generally runs with great speed, and it takes but little time to head off the traveler unless he takes instant measures for his safety.

There was the alternative of running northward from it.

But Frank was loth to go so far from their course. He was extremely anxious to reach Satan's Hole that night.

So his mind was made up.

"Put on all speed, Barney!" he cried. "We must beat the fire to the westward. This dry plain must end somewhere, and if we can reach the edge of it we will be safe."

"Go ahead is it, sor?" asked Barney.

"Yes."

"All right, sor!"

The travelers stood on the deck of the Whirlwind and watched the thrilling scene. With the rapidity of the wind the flames had burst into life all along the horizon.

Up into the heavens they mounted, going higher and higher, and seeming to gain volume and speed every instant. It was truly a wonderful sight.

And on sped the Whirlwind like its veritable namesake. It was a race against the flames—a race for life.

Every moment this became more and more palpable, for the fire ran with increased fury and seemed to gain most rapidly.

CHAPTER IV.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

THE deadly peril in which they now were, was well understood by Frank Reade, Jr.

He knew that to be overtaken by the flames, meant the total destruction of the Whirlwind.

Not that there was much about her that was combustible, for she was of solid steel, but the effect of the heat upon the electric machinery would ruin it.

Besides, all on board would no doubt be roasted like pigs in an oven. It was not pleasant to contemplate.

"No!" concluded the young inventor. "We must get out of here instanter."

He shouted to Barney to put on fresh speed; the race now became thrilling.

The flames had gained frightful volume, and were rising thousands of feet in the air. On they came with imposing grandness.

But death ran on before them, which fact altogether spoiled the beauty of the scene for the travelers. They were only too eager to get out of reach.

On and on sped the Whirlwind.

It did not seem as if greater speed could be added. And yet the flames gained.

Already their horrible heat could be felt. It now became evident that the only salvation of the party lay in running to the northward.

This was dead before the fire. If the Whirlwind was put to full speed, there was a chance yet to outrun the fire.

Instantly the machine was brought about. But at this moment, Frank's inventive genius came to the rescue.

Wall and Talcot were quite pale and much worried.

"Do you think there is any chance for us, Frank?" asked the ranch owner.

"Chance?" exclaimed the young inventor, curtly. "I'll make a chance. I ought to have done it before!"

Pomp cut a pigeon wing.

"I done flink yo' needn't worry, gemmens!" he said, with a comical grin. "Kain't nothin' beat Marse Frank. He allus hab a cure fo' eberyfing. I done flink he fix dat ar peralry fire pooty quick!"

Wall and Talcot were not a little puzzled as well as interested to see how this wonderful feat would be accomplished.

Frank vanished in the cabin.

When he came out he had a heavy lead weight and a long coil of wire. At this Wall laughed.

"Is that what you are going to beat the fire with, Frank?" he asked.

"You shall see!" replied the young inventor, coolly.

He threw the weight far out upon the prairie and began to pay out the wire.

Barney slackened the speed of the Whirlwind and by Frank's direction made a zig-zag route to the westward and then again to the eastward.

Then Frank said:

"Stop her, Barney!"

The machine came to a stop.

The fire was now not more than three miles distant, and coming on with the speed of a race horse. It seemed suicidal for the Whirlwind to stop.

Wall and Talcot each held his breath. They were more puzzled than ever. But a revelation was at hand.

The wire which Frank had thrown out was of a combustible material, an invention of his own. It was connected with the dynamos, and as the full force of the electric current shot through it, a long line of counter fire ran through the grass.

In a moment this was moving away ahead of the Whirlwind, and leaving a broad and blackened plain in its wake. Behind this fire the Whirlwind slowly moved on.

Frank's purpose was instantly seen.

As soon as the old fire reached this burnt strip of course its career was ended. The Whirlwind was in the rear of the new fire, and had nothing to fear from it.

The day was saved by a very neat and clever trick.

There was sufficient time for the new fire to get far enough ahead of the old one, so that the Whirlwind was safe from the injurious effects of the heat, though the air was a bit stifling for a time.

The Whirlwind was now out of danger.

A short while after she was again running full speed to the westward. It is needless to say that Wall and Talcot were much impressed with Frank's cleverness at evading the deadly peril.

But as they were running on over the blackened plain, suddenly Talcot pointed to the eastward, and cried:

"Look! Who is there?"

Two horsemen were seen galloping along in the verge of the burnt tract and just visible in the glare of the flames.

They were seen to suddenly draw rein as if the sight of the Whirlwind had surprised them. Then without further ado they wheeled their horses and fled like mad over the rolling plain.

Such a curious movement as this surprised all on board the Whirlwind.

"Begorra, it's afraid of us they are!" cried Barney.

"I don't flink dey hab berry good manners to be so berry unsociable as dat!" cried Pomp.

But Wall and Talcot had both been studying the distant horsemen, and now Wall with white, set face turned.

"I think I can explain it," he said.

"Indeed!" said Frank. "What is it?"

"Those two horsemen are the originators of this prairie fire, which was intended to engulf us."

"What!" cried Frank in amazement; "do you believe that?"

"I feel sure of it! They are Bill Sharp and Dan Burley. They followed us out of Big Gap, and getting to southward of us, no doubt thought they would settle our fate forever!"

"The scoundrels!" cried Frank. "I've a mind to give chase!"

"It would be of little use. We shall run across them again."

"You are right we will!" cried the young inventor, "and then they will not escape so easily!"

"We will all look to that."

The dastardly scheme of the two ruffians to destroy the Whirlwind had failed. That they would try again there was no doubt.

The whirlwind now kept rapidly on her way toward Satan's Hole.

No further incident was met, until suddenly the search-light shone full against a mountain wall about two miles distant.

"That is the Sentinel Range!" cried Wall. "We pass through that and into a valley, and Satan's Hole lies below us. We shall be there very soon now!"

"Hello!" cried Talcot, with sudden excitement. "What is that?"

Along the pathway of light myriads of forms suddenly swarmed just ahead.

"Indians!" shouted Wall. "Apaches, as I live!"

Instantly the yelling of the savage horde could be heard rising high on the night air.

They were really lying in wait for the mail stage from Big Gap and had mistaken the Whirlwind for it.

On they came in a body to the charge, mounted upon their lithe ponies; their lances gleamed in the glare of the electric light.

It was a thrilling moment.

The Whirlwind kept on at her rapid rate. The savages directly in her path were legion.

For some moments those on the deck of the Whirlwind were at a loss how to act.

But they were called to their senses in a sudden and startling manner. Bullets began to whistle about them.

They instantly sought shelter in the cabin.

Frank pressed a spring which closed all the windows and doors.

Barney brought the Whirlwind to a stop.

He could have plowed into the horde of savages. But the impact might derange the delicate machinery of the Whirlwind, so he refrained.

All the defenders of the Whirlwind were at the loopholes with Winchester and picking off savages as rapidly as they could fire.

The Apaches were advancing to the attack in their usual manner.

This consisted in riding their ponies madly in a circle about the Whirlwind, gradually closing in nearer and nearer.

They rode on the opposite side of their ponies so as to be out of range.

But every time they crossed the pathway of the search-light the aim was dead sure, and they got it full and fair. They tumbled in heaps.

The defenders of the Whirlwind thus held them at bay.

Bullets and arrows rattled against the steel armor of the machine, but they did no material harm.

"They'll soon get sick of that," laughed Wall. "Unless they change their tactics we'll whip 'em sure."

"We'll whip them anyway," declared Frank Reade, Jr. "Just see how we do it."

"Look out!" shouted Talcot, "they are massing for an attack!"

This was true.

The Apaches had suddenly changed their tactics. Closing up in a solid body they now made a direct charge upon the Whirlwind.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew well what this risk was. It was a supreme moment of peril; but he was ready for it.

Quick as thought he ran out to the forward pneumatic gun.

It was but an instant's work to train it and thrust a projectile into the breach; a quick aim and he pushed the electric button.

There was a tremendous earthquake like explosion and the air was lurid for an instant and filled with flying fragments of shattered Indians and ponies.

Straight into the midst of the oncoming mass of redmen the dynamite bomb had been thrown; it scattered the crew right and left.

Their advance was instantly checked. The ground was covered with heaps of dead and dying.

Once again Frank trained the terrible gun; but there was no need of it. The Apaches were put to rout.

However, Frank sent a shell after them to serve as a terrifier. In less time than it takes to tell it every survivor of the red gang was out of sight.

The brief engagement was over and was a signal victory for the Whirlwind.

The red foe were not a little taken aback by the reception they had received. The white man's "bull gun," as they called cannon, was too much for their nerves.

Perhaps the most delighted ones of the Whirlwind's defenders were Wall and Talcot.

"Upon my word," cried the ranch owner, "I think you can clean out the whole Apache country with this machine, Mr. Reade."

"I daresay," said Frank, with a smile. "However, I do not like useless slaughter. I will never take life needlessly."

"I approve of that. But just now it seems necessary to kill a few of these thieving Apaches!"

"I understand."

No time was wasted in ascertaining the number of savages killed. Frank was anxious to reach Satan's Hole.

So the Whirlwind sped on. Entering a pass in the Sentinel Hills, they quickly emerged upon a spur of the mountain wall, and saw the lights of their destination far below.

CHAPTER V.

AT SATAN'S HOLE.

SATAN'S HOLE was not a misapplication, so far as the name went for the little mining town of the Sentinel Range far down in New Mexico.

Deep down in a rock-incircled valley, was a small basin of water, deep and still, and upon its shore was the collection of huts and cabins which made up the town.

Nothing but the mania for gold could have induced any sane body of men to start a community in such a spot.

But gold had been found in large and paying quantities in the placers of the hills, and this had drawn the usual conglomeration of fortune seekers to the spot.

Yet the place was not without its natural beauties.

The rugged hills of granite and sandstone about were picturesque in their angles, and the small valley was possessed of a rich and fertile soil with the greenest of verdure.

The trail leading down the slopes into the place was a trifle rough and rocky.

But the wheels on the Whirlwind were rubber tired, and the shock was not greatly felt.

The search-light's rays were thrown down into the valley, and the town was revealed as plain as day.

No doubt the intensely brilliant ball of light seen by the denizens of the place far upon the mountain side created a thrilling sensation.

Down into Satan's Hole the Whirlwind slowly dropped. At length she was upon the level.

A quick run across a level expanse of green, and the machine rolled into the main street of the town.

The appearance of the Whirlwind created a great sensation in Satan's Hole.

The denizens of the town had by no means as yet retired. They were congregated about the tavern of the place, a rough but sizable board shanty called the "Hoof and Horn."

This was where liquor was dispensed in abundance, and great crowds of men met to try their luck at the gaming table.

The town was dimly lighted with oil, but the search-light made all as plain as day about the place.

A great commotion was created in the place as the odd-looking stage without horses drew up in the yard of the Hoof and Horn.

Miners, sports, ranchmen and gamblers all left the bar and the tables and rushed out.

They gazed in astonishment upon the strange apparition.

"Wall, I swow!" shouted one denizen. "What has cum tew town anyway? Are it a lokkermotive on ther ground, or hev it cum down outen the clouds?"

"Hyar's new-comers, Bill Haines!" cried another, as the burly landlord of the Hoof and Horn appeared on the scene. "Yer want tew put ther hosses up an' gin' 'em a good feed of railroad spikes, fer they don't eat oats, I reckon!"

Bill Haines, the bluff landlord, stared at the new arrival.

"Tain't cum from Hades, has it?" he gasped.

"Then it's cum tew ther right place, an' p'raps tew git Satan out of ther Hole!" cried another, and everybody laughed at the coarse jests.

But Landlord Haines was equal to the occasion. He saw that the new vehicle contained human beings, and as the door of the Whirlwind opened Wesley Wall and Tom Talcot walked out.

They were instantly recognized.

"Hello, Thoroughbred!"

"Howdy, old man Wall?"

"What hev ye got there?"

Now Wesley Wall knew the necessity of humoring this rough crowd so he went to the rail and addressed them.

"Gents," he cried, "this invention is from the effete East. It has been brought out here by its owner, Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., to whip the Apaches, and I reckon you'll all put that down as right."

Cheers greeted this announcement.

"Hurrah for the tenderfoot! Let's hear what he has to say."

Frank Reade, Jr., now appeared and saluted the crowd. He said:

"Gentlemen and friends, I am the owner and inventor of this machine, and I am here to help Mr. Wall here rescue little Corinne from the Apaches. You all know little Corinne."

Cheers again went up.

Frank had caught the humor of the crowd. A great point had been gained.

"Good fer yew, tenderfoot!"

"Y'ure welcome!"

"Git offen yer hoss!"

"Cum in an' hev some pizen!"

The crowd now flocked about the Whirlwind and were in the most good natured of moods. Frank politely declined all invitations to drink, but did venture to accompany Wall and Talcot into the bar-room of the hotel.

Barney and Pomp kept a close guard on the Whirlwind in the meanwhile.

Bill Haines, the landlord of the Hoof and Horn, tried to make himself agreeable to his visitors.

"I hope ye'll find the gal all safe," he declared. "It's about time that the reds got a good dose to teach 'em a leetle manners."

"We shall try and give them a smart lesson!" said Frank. "Our main object is to rescue Corinne, though!"

Thus the four men were engaged in conversation, when an odd

looking character slipped out of the crowd and touched Frank on the arm.

He made a mysterious gesture and the young inventor said:

"Well, what is it?"

"Come apart a leetle, stranger," said this individual. "I want to talk with you!"

Frank looked the fellow over.

He was a man just past middle-age and dressed in a rough garb, which was a cross between the garb of a plainsman and that of civilization.

His manner was secretive, his keen, foxy visage was lit up with a sharp pair of gray eyes which looked furtively about.

Frank yielded to the fellow's invitation, and followed him to a corner of the room.

Here the stranger paused and giving Frank a side-long glance began to rub his hands, and said:

"Yew don't know who I am, do ye?"

"I am sure I do not," said Frank.

"Waal, I'm Nicholas Grip, the gold-seeker. Everybody knows me. I've found more pockets of gold in these ere hills than any other man. But thet's all the good it ever did me!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "What has that to do with me?"

"With you?"

"Yes."

"It has a heap to do. Yew would like to know where the Hidden Canyon is, wouldn't ye?"

The fellow leered at Frank in a semi-idiotic and cunning way. The young inventor gave a great start.

"Yes," he replied. "I would like to know quite well."

"Waal," said Nicholas Grip, gleefully rubbing his hands. "I'm the only man in this part of the west who ever set eyes on the Hidden Canyon!"

"What?" exclaimed Frank, eagerly, "then you have seen the canyon?"

"Yes!"

"And know where it is."

"I do!"

"Will you take us to it?"

The gold-seeker rubbed his hands and laughed gleefully. Frank began to fancy that he was insane.

"I can do it!" he said.

"Will you do it?"

Grip nodded his head in assent.

"Take me with you on board your electric machine," he said. "I will take you directly to the Hidden Canyon!"

"You shall be repaid."

Grip scowled at this.

"I don't want any pay!" he declared, "talk with your friends. When yew are ready tew go I am!"

Frank turned and went back to the others. They had been watching his confab with Grip.

"Well," laughed Haines, the tavern-keeper "that chap has got a foul of you, has he? Did he tell you of a rich gold pocket?"

"Is that his weakness?" asked Frank.

"Indeed it is," replied Tom Talcot. "And he never wants remuneration. A strange sort of philanthropist is Nicholas Grip. Many a fortune has he discovered for other people."

"Then his claims are genuine?"

"Certainly," replied Wesley Wall. "Some of the richest pockets of gold in these hills were brought to light by him."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do."

Frank became somewhat excited.

"What offer do you think he made me?" he asked.

"Can't imagine."

"He claims that he knows just where the Hidden Canyon is, and that he can take us right to it."

Startled exclamations escaped the lips of Wall and Talcot.

"Did he say that?" cried Wall.

"Yes. I did not fancy that his tale was a genuine one."

"Oh, Grip is reliable!" cried Talcot. "What he says he means, but he is very eccentric. There are only certain people to whom he will tell his secrets. You are fortunate to be a favored one. Go and close with him at once!"

"What!" exclaimed Frank in surprise. "Do you really believe that he knows of the locality of the Hidden Canyon?"

"Why, certainly, if he says so. He knows more about these hills than any living man. He seems to bear a charmed life, for no Apache bullet has ever deterred him in his trips of exploration."

Frank needed no further bidding. He at once approached Grip.

"My good friend!" he cried, warmly; "I am constrained to accept your offer. If you can really aid us to rescue Corinne Wall you will be able to place a great Christian act to your credit."

Grip laughed again in his gleeful way and said:

"You shall see. It shall be so. Nicholas Grip never fails. Will you go in the morning?"

"With the break of day," said Frank.

"I will be on hand. Remember, Nicholas Grip never fails."

With his peculiar, chuckling laugh, the fellow ambled away. Frank watched him curiously out of sight.

Then he turned to the others.

"It is queer!" he declared; "but I feel sure that old fellow will bring us good results."

Wesley Wall's face was radiant.

"I feel more hopeful than ever," he said. "Grip is very reliable."

As there was no further reason for remaining in the bar-room, the three men went back aboard the Whirlwind. Barney and Pomp had meanwhile been vigilant.

But nobody had attempted to do the machine any damage. Frank and his companions went into the cabin to hold a conference upon action for the morrow.

As Frank passed Barney and Pomp he said:

"I know you two rascals want to go off on a lark. Well, go ahead. I will look out for the Whirlwind until you get back."

It is needless to say that this permission was eagerly accepted by the two jokers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIGNAL FIRES.

BARNEY and Pomp had no dearer desire than to get out and do the town. The permission given by Frank was therefore just what they wanted.

Pomp stood on his head, and Barney danced a jig.

"Ki-yi, chille!" cried the dorky. "I jes' lay fo' to hab some fun wid de natives ob dis place afo' mornin' come."

"Bejabers yez are roight, naygur!" cried Barney. "I'm wid yez!"

Pomp went down to his state-room and put on his best togs. The colors were of the usual killing kind.

When he came up he was a sight for a comic almanac.

He carried his banjo under his arm. When Barney appeared he looked like an edition of a Galway sport fresh from Donnybrook Fair.

He carried his fiddle carefully under his arm.

Together these two jokers climbed out of the Whirlwind and marched into the saloon, or rather bar-room of the Hoof and Horn.

Their appearance created a sensation.

The denizens of Satan's Hole were quaint characters themselves, but they had never seen a lark-ups like this before.

Loungers straightened up and squinted at the two, gamblers dropped cards, and chips and stared. It was truly a wonderful sight to them.

"Bust my galluses!" muttered one rough sport. "What d'ye call them picters? I never seed anythin' like that afore outen a dream."

But Barney and Pomp were apparently oblivious of all about them. They marched up to the bar and each slapped down a silver dollar.

"Gib dis chile a little 'gator juice wid a pine tree in it," said Pomp, pompously.

"I'll have a Dublin smash wid a squeeze in it, see!" said Barney, loftily.

The bartender stared at his new customers and elevated his chin.

"Talk United States," he said, gruffly. "If ye want a cocktail or a Tom and Jerry, I kin give it to ye."

"Oh, 'scuse me!" said Pomp, twisting around on one heel and thrusting a thumb in the arm-hole of his vest. "I thought I was in London. De cocktail will do this chile!"

"I ax yure pardon!" said Barney, deferentially. "As long as it's not in Oireland I am, I'll take the Tom and Jerry, an' belovely, too!"

The barkeeper pulled his long mustache fiercely, and as he mixed the "chained lightning," he vouchsafed:

"Look hyar, sports. Ain't got nothin' agin ye, but ye're not in Dublin nor ye ain't in Lunnon. See! Ye're in ther wild an' woolly Southwest, and there's lots of sharks lookin' fer jest sich pigeons as yew! Keep yer heads level!"

Barney and Pomp swallowed the drinks, made up wry faces at their vileness, and then Barney struck up a jig on his fiddle.

In a moment a great crowd was gathered about the two fun-loving chaps. Barney fiddled away, and Pomp danced a lively clog.

Then the darkey played a rattling, banging selection on the banjo and sang some plantation songs.

A lively time followed. At once the two attaches of Frank Reade, Jr., became extremely popular.

There is nothing the miner likes better than music and entertainment. Storms of applause rewarded the musical efforts, and the two jokers played and sang until nearly exhausted.

They were treated again and again, until finding that they were getting a trifle mellow, they wisely abandoned the lark and went back to the Whirlwind.

There were a few hours yet before dawn and they were glad enough to avail themselves of these for slumber.

However, when daybreak came all were astir.

Frank was anxious to get away as soon as possible. Nicholas Grip was on hand promptly.

The eccentric old gold seeker came aboard the Whirlwind, and his first move was to go about curiously examining it.

"Well, Nicholas," said Frank after a while. "What do you think of her?"

The gold seeker shook his head.

"Beyond me!" he declared. "I don't understand it. Wonderful!"

This was all that he would vouchsafe. But when the Whirlwind rolled away and out of town, he sat by the rail and seemed to thoroughly enjoy the sensation.

"He is a queer old fellow!" laughed Frank. "No doubt this is an experience which he will never forget!"

"Be sure of it!" said Wall. "The old goldseeker knows but little of the world outside of New Mexico. He has spent all his life here."

The Whirlwind rapidly left Satan's Hole behind.

Up out of the valley she sped, and soon was in a pass which led out of the Sentinel Range to the westward.

An hour later they were upon broad plains sweeping north and south to the horizon line. But to the westward was a dim range of hills.

"The Apache Mountains!" said Wall. "The Hidden Canyon and the stronghold of Cut Nose is in those hills. They are forty miles distant."

"Then we will be there in two hours," said Frank. "If Mr. Grip keeps his word and takes us to the Hidden Canyon, we shall very soon know the fate of your daughter."

Wall turned deadly pale and paced the deck with an agitated manner.

"God grant that she lives!" he said, fervently.

On sped the Whirlwind over the plain. Every moment the Apache hills grew nearer. Old Nicholas Grip watched them intently.

Suddenly he started up with a sharp cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank, who was near.

"Look!" cried the goldseeker. "Kain't yew see that column of smoke on that high peak thar?"

"Yes!" replied Frank.

"Don't ye know what that means?"

"No!"

"Wall, jest watch that other peak thar; do ye see now?"

"Another column of smoke!"

"Exactly!"

"What does it mean?"

"It means that them are signal fires. Ther savages know we are coming, an' they'll have a hot reception fer us!"

Frank knew that this was right.

This was the Apache method of signaling, and he knew that it was very effective. But he was puzzled.

"How should they be warned of our coming?" he asked. "I have not seen a sign of an Indian yet!"

Old Nicholas smiled.

"Some of them young bucks hev got reg'lar telescope eyes!" he declared. "Didn't yew run intew a wave of 'em afore yew got into Satan's Hole?"

"You are right," cried Frank, with sudden comprehension. "We did. Then it was them who carried the news to the hills?"

"In course!"

"Undoubtedly they are prepared for our coming?"

"Yew kin bet they air!"

"What do you advise?"

"Keep straight on. Thar ain't no other move. Yew can't work any surprise on 'em yew bet!"

So Frank followed the advice of the gold-seeker. The machine kept on until the hills loomed up near at hand.

The signal fires had now died out. It was a certainty that the Whirlwind was the cynosure of many pairs of keen eyes on the heights about.

"Is it easy to enter the hills?" asked Frank of the old gold-seeker.

"Quite so, I reckon," replied Nicholas. "Easier tew git in then tew git out."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I reckon they'll try tew git the best of ye after ye git intew the hills. Thet's their game not tew let ye git out if they kin."

Frank smiled at this.

He began to see fun ahead.

"You don't mean to say that they'll pitch onto us as soon as we get into the hills?" he asked.

"Yes, I do."

"What would you advise?"

"Don't go in."

"But—"

"Stay outside. After midnight yew an' I will risk a scout over the divide. P'raps we kin git into the hidden canyon."

"If we were sure of not being overpowered, would it not be better to go into the hills?" asked Frank.

"I reckon it would."

"Then we will do so," declared Frank, resolutely. "I will risk their capturing the Whirlwind. They'll have to do some tall fighting if they do."

"Cut Nose is a fighter," said Nicholas, significantly.

"I don't care if he is!" cried Frank, with impulse. "I am going in there. Show us the pass, Nicholas."

The gold-seeker did so. The machine entered the pass, and almost immediately the fun began.

A chorus of yells went up, and were echoed from various points up through the pass.

The savages were gathered in force upon the canyon walls and the mountain side.

That they meant to give the invaders a hot reception was certain. From the canyon walls a fusillade of bullets and arrows came raining down upon the Whirlwind.

Of course, these did no harm. The machine kept on up the gorge. But the crisis was at hand.

Suddenly Barney in the pilot house let out a terrified yell. He gripped the brake valve and brought the Whirlwind to a stop.

Not a moment too soon.

A mighty boulder came crashing down into the canyon and completely blocked the course of the machine. It was a close call for the machine.

Had the boulder struck it, it would have been demolished.

Here was a contingency for which Frank had not provided. Showers of stones and boulders came rattling down into the canyon.

"Begorra, Misther Frank!" cried Pomp, wildly, "it's a bad fix we're in. Shure if wan av thim big stones hits us, we're done for!"

"That is right!" cried Wesley Wall, in alarm. "I'm afraid we're in a bad scrape, Frank."

"Hold your horses!" said the young inventor, coolly. "We'll soon fix that."

Without a moment's hesitation Frank sprang to the wheel.

He gave it a quick turn, set the Whirlwind back a few yards and then ran around the boulder in its path. He made a straight course up the canyon.

But, intrepid and daring as he was, Frank saw that he was incurring a most terrible risk.

The savages were rolling enormous boulders to the verge of the canyon. Sooner or later one of these must fall upon the machine.

This of course would mean ruin to the Whirlwind. Such a horrible contingency must be avoided.

"But how? This was the question."

Frank disliked to turn about and go back in his course. Yet to go ahead seemed to invite certain disaster.

What was to be done? Certainly something very quickly, or a terrible catastrophe would result.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CANYON.

In this fearful predicament Frank Reade, Jr., was perhaps the coolest man on board.

The young inventor seldom lost command of his nerve. It was this remarkable faculty that now saved the day.

He chanced to see just in the nick of time a sheltered spot, where the canyon wall jutted out and formed a sort of partial roof.

Under this he ran the Whirlwind. It was not a moment too soon. A huge boulder crashed down upon the spot the machine had just left.

All up and down the canyon rocks and debris were being showered down over the cliffs.

It was certain that the redskins had adopted the best and only mode of safe attack upon the Whirlwind.

For the first time since setting out upon the expedition, Frank Reade, Jr., was stumped.

They were protected by the overhanging wall and were for the nonce safe, but this was all that could be said.

They could go neither forward nor back. The canyon was almost blocked with the huge rocks.

What was to be done?

The savages seemed for the moment to have gained the upper hand but Frank Reade, Jr., was not the one to yield easily to defeat.

He quickly hit upon a plan of action.

"It looks as if we were stuck, Frank!" cried Wall.

"I guess not yet," replied the young inventor, in a matter-of-fact way. "We will speedily ascertain."

"What are you going to do?"

"What I ought to have done in the first place, and that is clear yonder cliffs of the red imps."

"Can you do it?"

"We'll see."

Frank went forward and had soon reached the turret. He stepped out upon deck and put his hand upon the breech of the dynamite gun.

It required but a moment of time to insert a projectile. The pneumatic chamber was drawn back and he pressed the spring.

Out of the muzzle of the gun leaped the deadly dynamite projectile. It struck the brow of the cliff with a thunderous roar. The damage executed was most frightful to contemplate.

As chance had it, fully a score of the Apaches were here secreted behind heaps of rock.

They fancied themselves secure. They were undeceived in a most startling manner.

Death met them almost instantly. The rocks about were shattered and powdered, and the bodies of the savages hurled in air.

Some of them came tumbling down into the canyon. They were frightfully mutilated.

For a moment the event silenced the yells of the Apaches all up and down the gorge, but then they broke forth more fierce and savage than ever.

Frank smiled sardonically.

This was just what he wanted, as it enabled him to locate the largest bodies of the foe.

He sighted a spur of the canyon wall some two hundred yards further up the gorge. Here, he was sure, a large number of the foe were concealed.

Without a moment's hesitation he sighted the electric gun. There was a hissing sound, a recoil.

Then another projectile struck the wall at that angle. The air was filled with flying bodies and rocks.

Again and again Frank sent the deadly bombs along the mountain wall. From every hiding-place the savages were driven in wild confusion.

In less time than it takes to tell it he had literally swept the canyon wall of the red foe.

For the nonce the coast was clear; but how were they to proceed? Tons of boulders lay in the Whirlwind's path.

"You've cleaned 'em out, Frank!" cried Wall; "but how are we going to go ahead?"

"It looks dubious," agreed Frank.

Nicholas Grip, the gold seeker, had witnessed all with much interest. The query of Wall attracted his attention.

"There is a way!" he declared.

"Eh?" exclaimed Frank; "what is it, my good friend?"

"There is another pass and it leads to a cavern which will take us into the center of the hills; but we must first go back."

This was certainly interesting information and aroused the hopes of all.

To go forward was certainly out of the question, for to remove or displace the bowlders would require time, and the Whirlwind certainly could not go around or over them.

It seemed the only course to go back and so it was decided. Only one bowlder completely blocked the course in this direction.

And Frank quickly disposed of that.

He placed a dynamite cartridge of enormous power in the rear gun; he drew a line upon the bowlder.

Then he pressed the spring.

Bang—crash!

The huge bowlder was reduced to fragments which were lodged against the canyon wall. The path was literally cleared of the obstruction.

Barney reversed the engine, and the machine began to run backward down the canyon.

Suddenly Wall cried:

"Look out, Barney! Danger ahead!"

The warning came just in the nick of time. A wild, jeering war-whoop emanated from a clump of cedars far upon the mountain wall.

Down into the gorge came a huge bowlder. But its dislodgment was premature. The Whirlwind stopped just in time.

Frank instantly sighted the rear gun.

He pressed the spring.

The bomb struck in the midst of the cedar clump. In an instant the huge trees were shattered, and the landslide at that spot was startlingly transformed.

What became of the unwary Apaches there concealed was never known. They were not seen nor heard from again.

On down the canyon the Whirlwind now ran.

Soon they were once more out upon the plain. Then Nicholas Grip, the gold-seeker, pointed to the southward.

"Go on for a mile in that 'ere direction," he said. "I'll tell ye when we cum tew it."

"Is this secret path known to the Indians?" asked Frank.

The gold-seeker shook his head.

"Nobody knows about the cave but me," he declared. "It is a hard place to find. Go on as I tell ye."

Accordingly the Whirlwind kept on to the southward.

At the base of the hill the machine ran on for a mile, as ordered by Grip. Then the gold-seeker put up his hand.

Barney brought the machine to a stop.

Grip waited until it had stopped entirely then leaped down upon the ground.

He walked forward for some distance over a ridge of land. He was gone for some minutes.

At this point there were clumps of southern pines and mesquites. These dotted the slope here and there.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Wall, "this is a lonesome spot. I don't see why Satan should not pre-empt this spot and institute a new Hades."

"Indeed you are right," laughed Frank. "What fantastic forms the rocks have! There is a crude representation of his Satanic majesty done in sandstone over yonder."

The curious shapes of the rock formation were indeed remarkable. The imagination needed not a great amount of stretching to make the rocks into all sorts of ghoulish and fantastic shapes.

While studying these features Talcot chanced to gaze back over the mountain range.

He gave a start.

"Look!" he cried with thrilling force. "What are they up to now?"

New signal fires were seen blazing from almost every peak. It was very evident that the Apaches were concocting some new method of attack upon their foe.

There seemed not a trace of the red foe in this vicinity.

But it is a very trite saying in the Southwest that "When no Apache is in sight be sure there are plenty near."

So the travelers did not accept any undue risk, but kept a sharp lookout.

"What has become of Grip?" suddenly asked Wall, anxiously.

"Can anything have happened to him?"

Indeed, the goldseeker's absence had been quite extended. Twenty and then thirty minutes came and passed.

All now began to feel worried.

It was by no means impossible that he had been ambushed and killed by skulking Apaches.

"Upon my word!" cried Talcot, "I am anxious about him!"

"I done fink somebody ought to go an' look fo' him," said Pomp.

"Bejabers, I'll be wan!" cried Barney, eagerly. "Will yez let the two av us go, Misther Frank?"

"Hold on—there's no need of it!" cried Wall, suddenly. "As I live there he is!"

Sure enough Nicholas Grip now appeared to view over the ridge of land. He stood up quite erect and made some beckoning signs.

"Go ahead with the machine, Barney!" cried Frank; "he is beckoning to us to come on!"

"All roight, sor!"

The Whirlwind rolled forward and Grip ran on ahead. It was rather rough ground over the rise, but then the mouth of the gorge was seen.

A foaming torrent of water surged down through it. But upon one side there was a high and dry platform of rock.

Grip led the way out upon this.

Then as the Whirlwind came up he climbed on deck.

"All right!" he cried, gleefully; "there's not an Injun anywhere around here. The coast is clear."

"Good for you!" cried Frank, joyfully. "You are a hero, Nicholas Grip!"

The gold seeker shrugged his shoulders as if he did not like this assertion, but he said nothing.

He went into the pilot house now and showed Barney how to proceed into the canyon.

For fully a mile into the hills the canyon extended.

It was a wonderful and picturesque scene.

Upon one side rose the mighty canyon wall.

Upon the other the mountain torrent foamed and thundered down over the rocks.

But after a time a level was reached and here the water was slow and sluggish.

And now the canyon ended in a blank wall; further progress seemed barred.

The stream apparently ran out of a high arched cavern. The stream occupied the entire width of this; the ledge came to an end.

Barney brought the machine to a stop.

"Begorra, phwat now?" he cried.

Nicholas Grip cried excitedly:

"Go ahead!"

"Go ahead, is it?" gasped the Celt. "Shure, howiver kin I do that?"

"Can't you see? Go right into the cavern. Don't delay!"

Barney was dumfounded. He hesitated to obey this command.

For aught he knew this would be certain ruin and destruction. He had not sufficient confidence in the eccentric gold seeker; so he continued to hesitate.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET VALLEY.—THE FOOT-PRINTS.

THIS made Grip furious.

"Why don't you go ahead, you clown?" he yelled, "do as I tell ye."

"Begorra, I'm no sich fool as to risk goin' inter all that wather!" persisted the Celt, stubbornly.

"But it's not deep!"

"I'm not so shure av that!"

Nicholas Grip swore roundly for a moment. Then he ran out upon deck and leaped over the rail.

Along the shelf of rock he ran and straight into the cavern. Barney saw that at the point where he entered, the water was certainly not ankle deep.

"Begorra, that's quare enough!" muttered the Celt, "if it's no deeper than that shure the machine will go all roight!"

At this moment Frank came forward.

"We will trust him, Barney!" he said. "I see it all I think. This is the way the entrance to the cavern is made. The channel of the stream is on the other side and the ledge extends into the place, but is overflowed with the high current."

This was a correct solution. The machine entered the cavern.

As it was intensely dark in the place, Frank turned on the search-light. The Whirlwind crept cautiously along over the submerged shelf.

For a hundred yards this was necessary. Then the cavern broadened several hundred feet, and a distant gleam of daylight was seen.

Frank understood now exactly the character of the place. This cavern was nothing more nor less than the outlet of the river from an inner valley.

It was certainly a secret and safe way of getting into the hills.

The ordinary explorer would never have dreamed of entering the cavern through the apparent flood of water.

But there were few parts of these hills that old Nicholas Grip was evidently not familiar with.

Frank realized the keen advantage of having secured his services. They were almost invaluable.

Grip led the way through the entire cavern on foot.

The passage did not occupy over half an hour. Then the machine emerged into a green verdure-clad pocket in the hills.

Steep heights arose upon all sides. In most parts these were unscalable.

Grip had a smile of grim triumph upon his face as he came alongside the Whirlwind. He clambered up on the deck and Frank cried:

"What a feat you have accomplished friend Grip. We should never have dreamed of this place as being in existence."

"There's not an Injin in the Apache tribe knows of it," said the gold-seeker, positively. "We are all safe here. What is more we're not half a mile from the hidden canyon and its mystery."

"Its mystery?" asked Frank.

"Why, yes!" replied Grip, "haven't ye ever heerd of that?"

"Never!" replied Frank.

"Why, its upper end is harnted, they say, by ghosts. Ther Apache

never go up into that part of the canyon. It's too skeery fer them."

"Oh, an Indian superstition."

Grip opened his eyes and closed them again in an expressive way.

"Is it?" he exclaimed. "Wall, now, ye don't need to allow thet I'm superstitious."

"I should say not!"

"Yet I kin testify that thet part of thet Hidden Canyon is harnted by ghosts!"

Frank was astonished.

"You are not serious?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Ghosts?"

"Yes, an' I've seen 'em, long white robes and all."

Grip spoke positively. Frank saw that he was in dead earnest. Here was a new phase in the affair upon which the young inventor had not counted.

He was puzzled.

Yet he was too politic to dispute Grip. The gold-seeker threw off his coat, and said:

"We mought as well make ourselves comfortable hyar until night-fall. We koin't visit the canyon safely until then."

"What, then we cannot reach it with the Whirlwind?" asked Frank.

"I'm not suttin' yit. We've got to do some prospectin' fust. I think thar's a way the machine kin be got up thar. But we'll pay a visit to the place ter-night."

"And see the ghosts!" laughed Frank.

Grip did not reply. He had stretched himself out in a chair on the deck and appeared to be oblivious of all about him.

Frank exchanged glances with Wall. Both left the deck of the machine, and sauntered down to the bank of the river near.

They were intensely interested in this remote and secret valley in the hills which was not known to be in existence even to the cunning red men.

The fact that they were so near the Hidden Canyon, and that they were likely to set eyes upon it very soon, gave them a thrill, Wall particularly.

He was much excited, and was doubtless counting the moments until he should be able to effect the rescue of his darling child.

Along the bank of the river they were strolling, and Frank had just said:

"Only think; other than Grip we are the only white men, even visitors of this secret valley!"

"Or human beings likely!"

"Aye!"

Then both paused.

At the same moment they had caught sight of an object which indeed gave them a most startling thrill.

There, in the smooth sand of the river bank, were footprints. They were made by a white man also, without doubt, for the imprint of heel and sole was certainly that of a leather boot.

For a moment they were too astonished to speak.

Then Frank shouted:

"Grip, come here, quick!"

The gold-seeker heard the call and quickly responded. As he came up, Frank pointed to the footprints.

Words cannot express the sensation and emotion betrayed by the gold-seeker's face. For a moment he regarded the footprints with dilated eyes.

Then he gasped:

"Some one else knows of the valley, and comes here. That's durned queer!"

"And a white man, too!" said Frank.

Grip slowly nodded his head.

"Can it be that some one of the ghosts made those tracks?" asked Wall.

Grip did not seem to heed this last remark. He got down and examined the footprints.

He tried to follow the trail. But the spongy mass, like soil of the bank, precluded this. However, he did observe:

"The trail leads toward thet Hidden Canyon. Keep yer heads cool, friends. We'll know more about this before many days!"

Truly here was a mystery of no light sort. Its solution, however, was determined upon by all.

Frank had a secret theory that the footprints were in some way connected with the ghostly inhabitants of the upper canyon. He was determined to investigate the ghost story.

He mentioned this to Wall.

"I'm with you!" cried the ranchman. "I always did have a weakness for ferretting out ghosts. We will sift it!"

"If we see them!"

"Yes!"

"I rather doubt that part of Grip's story."

"Yet everything he has mentioned thus far has come true!"

"That is so!"

The result of all this was that all in the party anxiously awaited the coming of darkness so that the proposed visit to the Hidden Canyon could be made.

At length darkness began to shut down.

Pomp had prepared an appetizing meal to which all did ample justice. It contributed not a little to the rejuvenation of the spirits of all in the party.

Nicholas Grip was as silent and non-committal as ever. But there was a troubled light in his eyes, as if something troubled him.

Doubtless it was the mystery of the footprints in the river sand.

However this was, nobody ventured to enter into an argument with him upon the subject and so he was left to his own meditations. Darkness came, but it was not blackness. The silver moon rode high in the blue heavens, and bathed the landscape with a silver radiance.

"Will that balk us?" asked Frank, as he saw Grip studying the sky.

"Yew bet not!" replied the gold-seeker. "It will help us, I reckon."

"How soon will we start?"

"I reckon naow!"

"Good!"

It was arranged that Tom Talcot and Pomp should remain to guard the Whirlwind.

Frank, and Barney and Wesley Wall were to accompany Grip. Armed to the teeth and fully equipped they set out.

Across the valley they walked and then began to climb an ascent, which seemed to lead them between high hills.

Here was a sort of narrow pass which could not be seen from the valley.

Grip fell back to Frank's side, and said:

"I reckon the machine could go through here?"

"Oh, yes," replied Frank; "with the greatest of ease!"

"Then it kin be taken down inter thet Hidden Canyon," affirmed the gold-seeker; "that is a great point!"

"Indeed it is," declared Frank. "I am hopeful of success."

"Nicholas Grip never did fail!" declared the gold-seeker, shutting his lips tightly.

The party pressed on through the gap, keeping cautiously in shadows. Suddenly Grip paused.

"Look yender!" he whispered, hoarsely.

All eyes were turned in the indicated direction. There, against the smooth and rocky wall of a mountain was the reflection of a brilliant light.

It covered the entire mountain side and was intensely bright. The explorers gazed at it wonderingly.

"It is a reflection from thet camp-fires of thet reds in thet Hidden Canyon!" declared Grip.

"Ah! then we are above them?" asked Frank.

"Sartin! Ye'll see thet hull of 'em soon."

And a few moments later Grip led the party out upon a shelf of rock which hung over a mighty gorge.

Far below was the Hidden Canyon, a long and narrow valley, deep down among the stupendous hills.

It was well named the Hidden Canyon, for it was certainly hidden until one came upon it all at once.

And deep down there in the canyon a thrilling scene was revealed to the sight of the entire party. They gazed upon it with thrilled interest.

It was the encampment of an immense body of Indians. Apaches they were and their number must have been in the thousands.

There were tepees and rancherias of bark and skin, with huge baskets and earthen bowls for water lying about.

Hundreds of savages were figuring in the routine of the encampment of braves, squaws and children.

The glare of the camp-fires was powerful and lit up this part of the canyon well.

Truly a more secure or better hiding-place for Cut Nose's villainous gang could not be imagined.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GHOSTS.

For some while the party of white men gazed upon the Indian encampment silently. Then Wall said:

"Only to think. Perhaps my little girl is somewhere down there a prisoner in their midst."

"Begorra, if so thin she's loikely to remain so!" cried Barney. "Shure we niver cud git the Whirlwind down there!"

Indeed, this seemed true.

The walls of the gorge were very high and precipitous. There seemed no way for the Whirlwind to get down into the place.

But Frank said:

"Never mind! We can command the whole valley from this point with the electric guns!"

"And bring them to terms quickly enough!" said Wall.

"On me word, that is the way to fool the omadhouns, bad cess to them!" declared Barney.

Nicholas Grip made no comment. After they had studied the Indian encampment awhile, he said:

"Now, let us visit the Upper Canyon, or the Haunted Valley."

"Is that necessary?" asked Frank.

"It mought be," said Grip, curtly. "You mought like to see the ghosts, too!"

"Certainly," cried Wall. "You are in that, eh, Frank?"

"Oh, of course," laughed the young inventor.

But it was evident that Grip took matters seriously. He seemed to be a firm believer in the ghost theory. It caused Frank a smile.

He did not wholly discredit the gold-seeker's affirmations.

But he did disbelieve in the ghosts. He was certain that some natural phenomena would explain away the whole thing.

So he laughed softly to himself as they strode away upon the curious errand to the upper canyon.

A half hour later, after a tortuous way through sycamore scrub and rocky dells, the party came out upon the verge of a canyon wall. It was the upper end of the Hidden Canyon. All gazed upon the moonlit scene below.

It differed from the Lower Canyon, only in the fact that it was, if anything, more deeply walled in by high cliffs of stone. But Grip pointed to the north side, and said:

"Yonder is the long shelf of rock along which the ghosts take their walk. Keep a sharp eye out!"

Even as he spoke a curious blue and ghostly light seemed to run along the canyon wall.

It was followed by other tiny globules which seemed like will-o'-the-whisps gamboling madly along the dizzy height.

Frank watched the exhibition.

"Just as I thought!" he muttered. "Some natural phenomena!"

But the next moment a startling vision rewarded the gaze of all.

Out upon the canyon wall came a line of white forms. They looked like monks in cowls and gowns of purest snow white.

Astounded all gazed upon the strange sight. Along the mountain wall these dismal figures seemed to glide rather than to walk.

Frank Reade, Jr., gazed at the sight keenly. He was a skeptic.

"Those are human beings," he muttered; "but what is their game?"

This was the mystery.

If they were white men (for they could hardly be Indians) what was their motive in their fantastic act?

It might be a subterfuge to drive away the deadly Apaches; but what on earth could induce white men to dwell in this Godforsaken wilderness?

However, it was enough to know that they did dwell here. Not for a moment did Frank Reade, Jr., regard the strange figures as anything but tangible flesh and blood.

"There's some game to this," he muttered. "I can't understand it, but I mean to find out."

But Grip now gave all a surprise.

He had stood watching the faces of the others more than he did the strange figures in white.

Now he cried to Frank:

"Now what do ye think of it, pal?" he cried. "Do ye believe any in ghosts now?"

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"Those are not ghosts," he said.

"What are they then?"

"Human beings."

"Do ye think so?"

"Yes."

"I want to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"If a man should fire at those critters, and he was a dead shot, what would you expect to see?"

"I should expect to see the other man fall," said Frank.

"Wall, look at this!"

The old scout put a good charge into his gun. He elevated the muzzle and took deliberate aim at the ghostly figures. The others watched with interest.

Crack!

The rifle spoke sharply.

Not one in the party but expected to see one of the ghostly figures fall; but this did not happen.

Grip turned and recocked the repeater. He handed the rifle to Frank.

"Take aim!" he cried. "See if ye kin do any better."

Frank took the rifle but hesitated.

"I dislike to take human life," he said.

"Ye can't do it!" declared Grip, positively. "Go ahead an' fire, I tell ye!"

Thus adjured Frank lifted the rifle to his shoulder. He glanced along the sight carefully, selected the leading figure, and pulled the trigger.

The young inventor was a good shot.

He could have been almost sure of bringing down his man at that distance. But a surprise was in store for him.

The figure marched on in its gliding way as though it were but air, and not vulnerable to bullets. Something like a peculiar sense of awe which he did not like to admit came over Frank.

He lowered the rifle and stared at the distant target.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, "that is mighty queer!"

Nicholas Grip laughed softly.

"What did I tell ye!" he declared. "Ye can't bring down spirits with lead balls I kin tell ye!"

"That is very queer, Frank," said Wesley Wall. "Ugh! I can't say that I like the looks of the thing. Let's get out of this."

Barney's hair was on end, and he was shivering like a dog without his skin. All the superstitious terror of his nature was aroused.

"Begorra, it's a procession of banshees!" he declared. "Bad luck to him, we'd better git out of here!"

Frank Reade, Jr., had not a particle of superstition in his nature, and in spite of all the ghostly manifestations he had seen, he would not yet yield to such a belief.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed angrily, "that is all tomfoolery! Some clever rascals are playing a sharp game."

"It is queer, though, that if they are human beings, neither you nor Grip could drop one of them," said Wall.

"Ah, but they may be protected in some secret manner," declared Frank. "You may be very sure such is the case."

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course I do."

Before more could be said, however, the lights and the white figures vanished as if by magic.

The utmost blackness reigned in the spot where they had been.

For some moments all in the party remained silent; only Frank Reade, Jr., did not incline to a superstitious fear.

Even Wesley Wall, practical man that he was, felt nervous.

If it had been anything which he could have comprehended this would not have been so.

But he was wholly unable to understand the queer manifestations.

Frank Reade, Jr., was not long, however, in hitting upon a theory, though for the time he kept it to himself.

But Nicholas Grip was anxious to make action. He exclaimed:

"Well, what shall we do, cap'en? Do you want to bring your electric guns up here and attack the reds ter-nigh?"

Frank hesitated. Wesley Wall, who was eager for expeditious work cried:

"Yes, by all means let us do it. Can we not, Frank?"

The young inventor was silent a moment. He was considering the advisability of the move.

Had there been some strategic plan he would have preferred it. But he could think of none.

It would have been an easy enough matter to open fire upon the encampment in the Hidden Canyon from that range and speedily destroy it.

But on the other hand, would it ensure the safe recovery of Corinne Wall, which was after all the main object of the expedition.

If she was a prisoner in some one of the teepees below, it was possible that she might receive a fatal wound from some one of the bombs, as well as any of the red foe.

This was certainly a consideration not to be ignored and Frank realized it well.

But he finally decided.

"We will bring the machine up here!" he declared, "then we can decide upon the next move!"

"Good!" cried Wall, "I hope that all will be for the best!"

"We all hope that I reckon," said Grip.

With this conclusion, the little party of rescuers turned back down the mountain.

The course which it was deemed easiest for the Whirlwind to take was carefully marked out.

It did not require a great length of time for them to return safely to the Whirlwind. Pomp and Talcot welcomed them warmly.

The Whirlwind was at once started up the ascent and into the gap between the hills.

Soon it was upon the upper level, and progress the rest of the way was easy.

It was stationed at a point from whence a good view of both the upper and lower canyons could be had.

It would now have been a very easy matter for the young inventor to have destroyed the encampment so far below.

But he decided not to do it.

"I have another and a better plan," he said.

Wall was extremely impatient. But he did not demur at this decision of Frank's.

He knew that the young inventor understood his business, and he had full confidence in his superior judgment.

It was now some past midnight. All were upon the deck, when suddenly Barney gave a groan of terror.

"Begorra, there is the banshees agin!" he cried, "bad cess to them!"

The same strange light lit up the wall of the upper canyon, and again the white figures were seen gliding across.

For a moment Frank Reade, Jr., watched the scene with indecision.

Then he exclaimed:

"By heaven, I will unravel that mystery!"

Quick as a flash he ran forward and drew the slide of the search-light.

It was a risky move, for it might reveal the presence of the Whirlwind to the Apaches on the other side.

But Frank was so intent in his purpose that he did not heed this fact.

The glare of the electric light fell full and fair upon the canyon wall.

Almost instantly a blood-curdling shriek rose upon the air of the canyon, and the white figures disappeared.

There was revealed the wall of the canyon as plain as day.

But not a sign of the spirits could be seen, nor was there any indication that they had ever been there. Not the slightest foothold for a human being was visible.

Frank kept the glare of the search-light upon the spot some moments. Then he shut it off.

All was darkness. The ghosts had truly taken flight.

"That's a clever trick, however it's done," muttered the young inventor, "but I think I can unearth the secret!"

He turned to Wall.

"I don't see as we can do anything at present with the Apaches," he said. "I am interested in this ghost story, and I think first it will be advisable to solve the mystery. It may lead to valuable discoveries."

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET MINE.

"VERY well!" agreed the ranch owner, readily. "I leave all in your hands, Mr. Reade. Can I assist you?"

"It is possible," replied Frank. "Pomp, I want you to get ready to go with me!"

"A'right, sah," replied the darky, with much alacrity.

Frank's preparations were quickly made. He took a long coil of wire which was connected with the dynamos and a telegraph sounder and connecting battery.

Barney was to remain in the pilot-house and follow certain instructions given by Frank.

Grip had stood by nonchalantly until now. Then he said:

"Well, Mister Reade, what about me?"

"Oh, you!" exclaimed Frank, "of course I want you with me. Let us be off!"

And the three explorers left the deck of the Whirlwind and set forth in the utter darkness.

Frank paid out the wire as he went on. Barney had his orders to, at a signal from Frank by means of the sounder, connect the wire with the dynamo and turn on the full current.

Along the wall of the canyon the three men silently made their way. It was some three hundred yards around to the brink of the precipice above the spot where the ghosts "walked."

Arrived at this point Frank advanced to the very verge of the precipice. He lay flat upon his stomach and attempted to pierce the depths below.

But the darkness was too great. He listened, but all was the stillness of the grave.

Grip had been at his side all the while.

"Wall!" exclaimed the gold seeker, with interest, "what do ye think of it, Reade?"

"Can't say yet," said Frank, laconically. "I'm going to take a little trip of investigation down there."

"Yew are?"

"Yes."

"But how will ye do it?"

"I'll show you!"

Frank drew from his pocket a coil of steel rope. It was fully one hundred feet in length, and while seemingly small to bear his weight, was nevertheless capable of bearing six times as much.

One end of this steel rope he fastened about a spur of rock in a secure manner. Then he turned to Pomp and Grip:

"Now I want you to follow my directions implicitly!" he said.

"A'right, Marse Frank!" replied Pomp. "Wha' am it yo' want?"

"I want you to lower me over the edge. I will signal you when to stop or to pull me up. See!"

"All right," agreed Grip.

Frank slid over the verge of the cliff. Down he slid along the face of the cliff.

Suddenly his feet encountered something which was adjusted to the face of the cliff.

He reached down and put his hand upon it. It was a wire.

"I thought so!" he muttered.

There were a number of wires running across the face of the cliff. Frank grasped one of them and made his way along around an angle in the wall.

This brought him to a crevice which could only be seen from a certain angle. All was darkness in the crevice.

Nerve was one of the young inventor's characteristics. He did not hesitate to step boldly into the crevice.

He felt a draught of air, and with a thrill realized that there must be a sizable cavern beyond. What mystery was all this?

Frank knew that this could never be the work of the Apaches. Perhaps a band of outlaws occupied the place.

He crept into the crevice.

Disengaging the rope by which he had descended, he tied it to a spur of rock, and then crept into the cavern.

He carried the slender dynamo wire and the telegraph wire which he paid out from the spools as he went on.

He listened cautiously, and was given a start when he came suddenly face to face with a number of white figures.

But they were inanimate. He put out his hand and felt of them.

"Puppets strung on a wire!" he muttered, "that explains why the bullets did not bring them down!"

The wires were so cleverly arranged that the puppets could be made to travel back and forth across the cliff in mid air.

There was a smell of phosphorus and brimstone, which explained how the sepulchral light was made.

But where was the human operator of this strange device?

This was the query which now occurred to Frank, and which greatly interested him. He was determined to ascertain.

Suddenly he paused as he was groping his way along in the dark.

A distant peculiar sound came to his hearing.

He placed his ear to the wall of the passage, and listened. There was no mistake. He heard quite plainly the regular methodical ring and thud of a pickaxe far in the distance.

Like a flash the explanation of all came to Frank.

It was a secret mine.

The ghost game was a device for keeping the stealthy Apaches at bay and protecting the miners at their work.

But who were the miners?

Frank knew well enough that there were many rich mines of gold

in these hills, but that as a rule they could not be safely worked for fear of the murderous Apache.

If it was true that white men were thus secretly delving for treasure in these hills, their methods were ingenious and their courage certainly great.

It was intensely dark in the passage, but Frank pushed on slowly.

Suddenly he came to an angle in the wall; here the passage intersected with another.

A cold draught came from a passage to the right.

"That leads to the open air," thought Frank. "I shall go to the left."

He was guided now by the ring of picks, and he heard the hum of voices. Pushing ahead, he turned another angle in the passage wall and came upon an astounding scene.

A dozen rough-clad men occupied a high arched cavern chamber, which was lit by oil lamps protected by screens of wire.

They were digging in the alluvial soil of the cavern floor. By the light of a lantern on the ground near Frank saw a heap of yellow stones. He knew that they were nuggets of gold.

No doubt a mighty fortune was there represented. The young inventor gazed upon the scene with interest.

What should he do? He tried to probe the character of these secret miners by their faces. They all looked honest to him.

His mind was instantly made up.

He stepped boldly into the cavern, and said:

"How are you, friends? I give you good cheer!"

The effect of this was startling. Excited cries went up, and the miners dropped their picks and snatched up rifles which they aimed at Frank. But the young inventor put up his hand.

"Hold!" he cried. "I come as a friend. You will not shoot me!"

"Who are you, and how did you get in here?" cried the leader of the miners, almost fiercely.

"I am a friend, and I came in by way of the cliff," replied Frank.

"The cliff?"

"Yes? I was endeavoring to solve the ghost mystery, and lowered myself down on a rope only to find my way in here."

The miners exchanged glances.

"The jig is up, boys!" cried one of them. "We are exposed."

"Don't say that!" cried Frank, reassuringly. "Your secret is safe with me. We must be friends."

There was a moment's silence. Then the leader of the miners said:

"You talk fair. May I ask how you came to penetrate these hills, which are the hotbed of the Apache Indians?"

"Certainly," replied Frank. "I came here to rescue a young girl who was captured, and is now held in captivity by Cat Nose."

The manner of the miners instantly changed. The leader came forward and held out his hand.

"We are honest men," he said, "and if we can trust you, be sure, we will be your friends!"

"I am a man of honor," said Frank, earnestly. "You may be sure of that."

"And you will never betray us?"

"What would be my motive? I am a wealthy man."

"What is your name?"

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor. I am here with my new machine, the Prairie Whirlwind, to help Mr. Wesley Wall to rescue his daughter Corinne."

"Wesley Wall!" cried one of the miners. "Why, he is a dear friend of mine. Do you mean to say that little Corinne has been captured by Cat Nose?"

"It is true," replied Frank; "and Mr. Wall is now with my companions aboard the Whirlwind outside on the cliff."

"What!" cried another miner, "was it you sent that powerful light against the cliff a short while ago?"

"That was the electric search-light of the Whirlwind," said Frank.

With this, general explanations followed. Frank found at once that the miners were interested in his project.

"We have feared an attack from the Apaches very much," said John Bruce, who was the leading spirit of the party, "but the ghost arrangement which we rigged up has kept 'em from coming into this canyon."

"If they should discover that it was a fraud?" asked Frank.

"Then it would be blue times for us. They'd overrun us pretty quick!"

"Do they know of the existence of this cavern?"

"No, but the discovery that the ghosts were not bona fide spirits would open their eyes, and it is hard indeed to hide anything from an Apache!"

As Bruce ceased speaking a sudden ominous sound fell upon the ears of all and gave them a start.

From the distance down the dark passage leading into the mine there came the sound of rapid footsteps.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT UNDERGROUND.

The sound created a sensation. At once every miner seized his gun.

"What is it?" cried Bruce in alarm. "Something is wrong!"

Before further speech could be made a white-faced, hatless man burst out of the gloom and into the cave.

He was a miner like the others and was familiar to them.

Breathless and exhausted, he nearly fell.

"What is the matter, Bill Gaines?" cried Bruce, leaping forward.

"What has gone wrong?"

"We are lost!" cried the man hoarsely.

"Lost?"

"Yes, the savages have discovered the entrance under the mesquite clump and are now on their way in here! They will annihilate the whole of us!"

It was a most horrifying declaration. Entrapped in the secret mine terrible indeed would be the result.

A battle under ground would ensue. It could have but one result.

The savages from mere weight of numbers would triumph. The miners would be butchered like rats in a trap!

For a moment a terrible silence reigned.

It needed no explanation for Frank Reade, Jr., to comprehend the situation. But he was cool and calm.

He did not share the general excitement of the miners. Perhaps there was a good reason for this.

"My God!" exclaimed Bruce, "We are in a bad trap, Mr. Reade."

"Can you not hold the red foe at bay?" asked Frank.

"How can we do so?"

"Why not?"

"Their numbers are overpowering!"

"I think I could do so!"

The miners stared at Frank. No doubt they marveled at his coolness. The young inventor smiled.

"How long will it take the Indians to reach us?" he asked of Gaines who had brought the alarm.

"Not more than twenty minutes I should say," he replied.

"Oh well, that is time enough!" declared Frank. "We will give them a hot reception!"

He had left the spools containing the electric wire at the entrance to the cave. He quickly advanced and picked them up.

It was but a moment's work to adjust the sounder and battery. Then he pressed the key.

The miners watched him curiously.

On board the Whirlwind Barney heard the clicking call. He instantly rushed to the key and made reply.

"Are you there, Barney?" asked Frank.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Be ready then to make connections with the dynamo, when you hear from me again."

"All right," came back the reply.

Frank now laid down the sounder. He picked up the larger wire and proceeded to string it zig-zag across the passage about one hundred feet from its end.

It did not take long to do this; then he pressed the telegraph key. In an instant he knew that the full force of the dynamo was in the wire.

Already far down the passage lights were flashing.

Distant yells were heard. The savages were coming.

Frank and the miners crouched back in the shadows and out of range.

The crack of rifles woke the echoes of the passage. The savages were firing into the cave.

But the bullets flattened themselves against the cavern wall. No harm was done.

Frank waited with taut nerves for the first contact with the live wire. The next moment it came.

The result was thrilling.

A terrible agonized death yell went up on the air of the passage.

The savage was hurled back as if by giant hands.

The deadly wire was, of course, unseen in the gloom. Another savage came across it.

Of course this was just as fatal as the first contact. But the savages in the rear of the fated ones thought they had been killed by bullets.

And on they came. One after another struck the deadly wire, and was knocked lifeless.

Those in the rear, seeing so many of their colleagues fall dead at this one point, naturally caught the alarm.

The Indian, when face to face with a narrow passage of death, is a rank toward.

Therefore, the savages were impelled by sheer horror to halt in their course. The tide was turned.

The astonished miners were altogether at a loss to explain the affair. How the savages could meet such a sudden and certain fate was a bit of a mystery.

"Is it electricity?" asked Bruce of Frank.

"A powerful current!" declared the young inventor, "contact with the wire is instant death!"

"You don't say so? Where do you get the power?"

"From the dynamos on board the Whirlwind," replied Frank.

"Sho! did you bring a wire with you all the way into this cave?"

"I did!" replied Frank, "and it's mighty lucky for us that I did!"

"I should say so!"

The savages had thrown themselves flat upon the floor of the passage, and were making their way slowly along in this manner.

But Frank had provided for just such a contingency as this. One of the coils lay next the ground.

The foremost savage of course could not avoid coming in contact with it. He leaped several feet in the air and died with one awful yell of anguish.

This was enough for the Apaches.

Once more their superstitious fears were aroused. They could not do battle with such a terrible unseen and intangible foe.

Their superstition prevailed, and convinced that the evil spirits defended the cave they broke and fled incontinently.

The victory was won.

The lives of all in the cavern were saved, thanks to Frank's marvelous method of repelling the foe.

The excitement of the miners was intense.

"That was wonderful work, Mr. Reade!" cried Bruce, "truly you have nothing to fear from the savages!"

"Ah, yes I have!" said Frank.

"What is that, pray?"

"I fear that they will do great harm to little Corinne before I can rescue her!"

"It is strange that they have not done so before?" ventured one of the miners.

"I believe her abduction was not altogether the work of Cut Nose," said Frank.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bruce.

"Did you ever hear of a certain cut-throat and desperado, named Bill Sharp?"

"Bowie Bill Sharp!" cried Bruce. "Why, yes. He is hand in glove with Cut Nose. I have often seen him down there in the canyon with the Apache chief."

"Do you mean that?" cried Frank, excitedly.

"Of course I do."

"Then that is evidence enough to hang him. Gentlemen, I must leave you now. I have quick work to do."

"Where are you going?" asked Bruce.

"Back to the Whirlwind."

"One moment."

"Well?"

"Can we not go with you? We are anxious to see this thing out. We have nothing to gain by staying here now for our secret mine is discovered."

"If you chose you can," replied Frank. "It will necessitate being drawn up over the cliff."

"We are agreeable."

"All right. Let us then be off."

Frank struck the telegraph key. Barney at once responded.

"Shut off the current," wired Frank.

"All right!" came back the reply.

Then the current left the deadly wires, and they were once more harmless. Frank then proceeded to re-roll them on the spools, and thus made his way rapidly back to the crevice in the cliff by which he had entered.

Pomp, Nicholas and Grip were waiting for him there.

At a signal from Frank they quickly drew him up over the edge. It required but a few words for Frank to tell them of his experience.

It is needless to say that they were intensely interested. The rope was lowered for the secret miners to use.

One by one they came quickly up over the brow of the cliff.

But Frank and Pomp and Grip did not wait for them. The young inventor knew that he must make prompt action.

It was necessary to reach the Whirlwind and open an attack upon the red foe at once.

When the machine was reached, Barney, Talcot and Wall, were eagerly awaiting them.

Frank hastily recited his experiences, and then said:

"There is only one way to do, and that is to openly attack the Apaches right in their den. We have them practically entrapped."

"You are right, Frank!" cried Wall. "Let us wipe them off the face of the earth!"

"I have evidence that Bill Sharp is in league with Cut Nose."

"Then destroy the whole camp, root and branch! We will have to take chances on doing harm to Corinne though—"

All exchanged glances. Here was a most dubious point.

But Frank said:

"With the aid of the search-light I think we can distinguish the savages and aim only to keep them from escaping from the trap."

"We ought to be able to do that."

No further time was wasted.

But even as Frank went out upon deck he saw that the gray light of dawn was breaking in the east.

"That is good!" he cried joyfully. "We shall soon have daylight to aid us."

He at once perceived a startling state of affairs in the valley below. The Indians had in some way got the alarm and the whole camp was in a state of great confusion and excitement.

Frank saw that the savages were trying to get out of the valley by the lower end.

He smiled grimly.

"I will stop that!" he muttered.

It was but a moment's work to put a projectile in the breech of the electric gun.

Then he sighted it for a huge rock at the extremity of the Hidden Canyon. He pressed the spring.

There was a terrific roar and a great column of debris rose in the air as the projectile struck the rock.

The savages fleeing in that direction came to a halt.

They ran hither and thither like frightened sheep. Some of them threw themselves flat upon the ground.

Again and again Frank sent warning bombs hurtling down the valley. It was a most effectual move.

The savages were thrown into a state of the most frantic of terror. They were wholly uncontrollable.

Daylight had broken over the valley, and they saw the object of their terror far above them on the canyon wall.

The Prairie Whirlwind looked to them a grim destroyer, and they were more than ready to come to terms.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END.

It was a thrilling scene indeed. The secret miners, under the lead of Bruce, were ensconced upon the canyon wall engaged in picking off the Apaches with their rifles.

Nicholas Grip was right in his element.

Every time a shell burst in the valley he leaped in the air and shouted with great glee.

"Give it to 'em!" he yelled. "Their day has come! Cut Nose will never reign in these 'ere hills agin!"

Barney and Pomp, as well as Talcot and Wall, were on the lookout for some sign of Corinne.

But if she was in the Apache camp she was not to be seen. But of a sudden a new development turned up.

Barney, who had been scanning the scene intently, suddenly cried:

"Begorra, Misther Frank, wud yez luk at the loikes av that!"

Frank saw the thrilling move at the same moment. Across the lower end of the valley two ponies suddenly dashed.

Each had a rider.

One was a powerful framed white man with broad sombrero. The other was the slender form of a young girl whose arms were bound tightly and who was also bound to the saddle.

For a moment the sight nearly drove the rescuers frantic.

"Corinne!" shouted the frantic father. "My child! Oh, save her!"

There was no doubt but that the frantic man would have leaped over the verge of the cliff had not Barney and Pomp held him back.

"It is Corinne!" said Talcot, tensely, "and that is Bill Sharp the renegade!"

The villain knew that he was safe from the projectiles, for Frank would not risk the injury to Corinne.

He was practically beyond rifle range. His purpose no doubt was to escape with his fair prize.

At the entrance to the narrow pass leading out of the hidden canyon he turned and waved his sombrero jeeringly. Then both vanished.

"Stop him, my God! Is there no way to save her!" screamed Wall, excitedly.

"Yes!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., in trumpet tones. "Get aboard here, all of you!"

"Hurrah!" cried Talcot. "We have broken up the viper's nest. Now, we must run him to earth. We will overtake him and save Corinne."

"We will, if it is within human power," declared Frank.

All piled aboard the Whirlwind. The miners, under John Bruce, ranged themselves along the deck.

And Frank went to the wheel.

It was a rough ride down through the gap into the Hidden Valley. The progress through the cave and the water was necessarily slow.

But soon they emerged, and were bowling along the smooth shelf beside the canyon torrent.

The further they went the smoother grew the course, and additional speed was put on.

Suddenly the machine shot out upon the level plain. Along the base of the Apache hills it thundered.

Every eye was on the lookout for the villain Sharp and his prize. It was a moment of intensity.

There was a long pass leading up the entrance of the hidden canyon. Here was where he must emerge.

Every eye was upon the spot.

Had he emerged, and was he safe now in some distant hiding place? It was a momentous question.

But Frank did not believe this. The machine had made a quick run down out of the hills. It would seem certain that the outlaws would be cut off.

Yet he was not in sight.

On ran the Whirlwind with increased speed. Of a sudden a yell went up.

"There he is!"

It required not a second glance for Frank Reade, Jr., to see that this was true. Down out of the pass there dashed the two ponies.

Sharp seemed aghast at sight of the Whirlwind. Doubtless he had felt secure in his ability to get down to the prairie long before the machine.

Its appearance there now right in his path was a crushing reverse for him. For a moment he was seen to look right and left as if for an avenue of escape.

But there was none.

He put spurs to his pony and a hot race ensued along the base of the hills.

But of course the Whirlwind had the advantage. It gained rapidly, and as the villain looked over his shoulder his face could be seen contorted with rage and fear.

The young girl, Corinne Wall, seemed to be trying to break her bonds in an eagerness to escape. Her courage was remarkable for one of her sex.

Suddenly Sharp was seen to rein the ponies up. A revolver flashed from his belt, and he was about to aim at Corinne.

His fell purpose was seen. This was to kill his fair captive.

But the bullet never sped to its fair mark. Frank Reade, Jr., in the pilot house had seen the villain's intention even before the revolver could leave his belt.

Quick as a flash the young inventor dropped the wheel and seized his rifle. He flung it to his shoulder with quick and sure aim.

Only a dead shot could have taken that long chance.

But Frank Reade, Jr.'s, eye was quick, and the bullet sped true to its mark. Bill Sharp dropped from his pony's back.

A few seconds later the Whirlwind drew up at the spot. Wesley Wall had his beloved daughter clasped to his bosom safe and sound, after many trials. Bill Sharp was dead. The mission of the Whirlwind in that part of New Mexico was accomplished.

Back to his ranch Wesley Wall and Corinne went with Tom Talcot. It was a happy time for them. They were loud in unending praise and gratitude to Frank Reade, Jr.

But for the Prairie Whirlwind and its famous inventor, no doubt Corinne Wall would have met a sad fate in the power of her brutal captor.

Frank went back to Satan's Hole for the time being.

He was the hero of the hour, and from all the wild country for hundreds of miles about the rough miners and ranchmen came in to shake hands with the most wonderful man of the day, and see the Prairie Whirlwind.

Nicholas Grip was never in so happy a frame of mind, and was loud in his praise of Frank Reade, Jr.

Frank remained long enough in that part of New Mexico to clean out Cut Nose and his gang.

Then the rich gold mines of the Hidden Canyon were opened up publicly. It was no longer necessary to mine secretly.

John Bruce and his friends waxed wealthy, attributed their good fortune entirely to the Prairie Whirlwind.

An extensive trip through all the Apache country Frank made. Then one day he started for home.

Readstown was safely reached, and Frank, and Barney and Pomp as well were glad to get back home.

But Frank almost instantly began to project another invention, which he was determined should, if possible, eclipse the Prairie Whirlwind.

[THE END.]

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